A BRITISH SEA RAIDER OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Feats of the Emden and Dresden Recall the Four Year Cruise of Commodore George Anson

ABOUT four hundred miles west of Valparaiso, Chile, lies the Island of Juan Fernandez. Every child familiar with the story of Robinson Crusoe has heard of that isolated spot in the South Pacific, and of late the place has figured again in naval strategy as it did nearly two centuries ago. Such is a way history has of repeating itself. Indeed the recent sea fighting has come precious close to duplicating the days of the buccaneers and their more reputable kindred, the privateers.

It was in the neighborhood of Juan Fernandez that Admiral von Spee assembled his squadron before defeating the British force under Sir Christopher Cradock. Near these same waters the Eitel Friedrich and other German raiders met surreptitiously the supply craft sent to give them the means of continued activities. And in plain sight of this island the elusive Dresden was finally caught in her tracks and sent to the bottom by the English cruisers. But all of these happenings pale beside the tale of the astonishing exploits of Commodore George Anson in the same region when Juan Fernandez succored his famished men, permitted him to refit his storm wracked ships and served as a pivotal point for his operations against the coasts of Chile, Peru and Mexico.

We shall see that the vaunted efficiency of the British fleet is not so old as most of us might imagine. The manner in which Commodore Anson was equipped for his work in the South Sea is striking proof of the appalling shiftlessness with which the royal navy was managed by the Admiralty in the first half of the eighteenth century. That Anson succeeded at all in the dangerous mission cut out for him is cause for wonderment and evidence as well of his remarkable resourcefulness and his determined character. A mere sketch of Anson's voyage around the world between the years 1740-44 inspires amazement in these days of steam and wireless and physical luxuries, for then the wind was the only motive power, food was of the coarsest, sanitation sadly deficient and disease an ever present enemy to be battled with. Then, too, ships held the seas for many long months at a time and navigation was a rule of thumb procedure that left many loopholes for perilous errors.

Remembering how the Allies have lately stripped Germany of her colonial possessions in an effort to weaken her resources, the reasons for Commodore Anson's expedition is all the more interesting. This bit of history from the record of his voyage is illustrating:

"When in the latter end of the summer of the year 1739 it was foreseen that a war with Spain was inevitable, it was the opinion of some considerable persons than trusted with the administration of affairs that the most prudent step the nation could take, on the breaking out of the war, was attacking that crown in her distant settlements; for by this means it was supposed that we should cut off the principal resources of the enemy, and should reduce them to the necessity of sincerely desiring a peace, as they would hereby be deprived of the returns of that treasure, by which alone they could be enabled to carry on a war."

The project arranged for Commodore Anson was to sail into the Pacific, then commonly called the South Sea, and to harass the Spanish trade and ports along the whole western coast of South America and the Pacific shores of Mexico. Months were lost in the equipping of his squadron and well nigh a criminal course was pursued in the manning of his ships. Indeed, instead of being furnished with a proper complement of seasoned sailors and trained marines a considerable percentage of the personnel was drawn from the invalid pensioners of Chelsea College.

So long was the squadon in getting ready that the Spanish learned of its organization and purpose, and, procrastinating as that nation has always been, it was nevertheless alert enough to start a superior force for the South Sea some time in advance of Anson's sailing from England. The Spanish squadron was under the command of Don Joseph Pizarro, and so well informed was the enemy that Pizarro actually knew the distinctive character of Commodore Anson's broad pennant of red and was prepared to fly it when that decoy might serve his purpose.

But the Spaniards paid a frightful price for their earlier start. In his haste to be off before Anson, Don Joseph put to sea with his six ships and nearly three thousand men with only four months' provisions aboard. Arriving at the mouth of the River Plate to revictual, Pizarro learned that Anson had touched at the Portuguese island of St. Catherine's, off the coast of Brazil and 700 miles to the north. Being overanxious to get around Cape Horn and into the Pacific in advance of his foe, the Spaniard left the River Plate without obtaining supplies. This neglect proved Pizarro's undoing. When near Cape Horn he was overwhelmed by a succession of westerly storms that scattered his ships and drove them steadily eastward. Scurvy soon appeared among the crews and starvation added to the desperate situation. Matters were made still worse by a conspiracy among the marines aboard the flagship Asia.

Commodore Anson fared comparatively a good deal better, but in rounding Cape Horn he, too, had a desperate battle with the westerly gales and the steady easterly drift of an unsuspected current. Fortunately, he had reprovisioned his vessels at St. Catherine's.

Commodore Anson sailed away from St. Catherine's on the 18th of January, 1741, and before leaving that halting place he buried twenty-eight of his men and left with ninety-six sick aboard. The other ships of his squadron suffered in like manner and some of them to even a greater degree. A month's sail carried them down to the coast of Patagonia, where a brief halt was made to refit one of the damaged fleet. On the 27th of February the vessels weighed anchor, and their goal was the Chilean port of Valdivia, which Anson expected to take by surprise and make his base for further operations against Spanish commerce and the enemy's ports reaching northward to Mexico. The Commodore and his men were full of dreams of rich booty in the form of gold and silver from the mines of Chile and Peru. But fate had many desperate disappointments in store for the British ships.

Finally when his force headed northward toward the Chilean coast it consisted of but a couple of shattered half manned cruisers and a sloop, "so far disabled that in many climates they scarcely durst have put to sea." By this time the men were living upon salt provisions, and this unwholesome diet soon provoked an outbreak of scurvy. With weakened crews the peril of shipwreck on the Chilean coast was increased, and all thought of attacking Valdivia had to be abandoned. Instead Anson determined to seek a haven at Juan Fernandez Island, where his sick could be landed, all hands refreshed and his greatly reduced squadron refitted and repaired. But again misfortune crossed his path.

As Anson describes it, "Our deplorable situation then allowed no room for deliberation, so we stood straight for the island of Juan Fernandez to save time, which was now extremely precious, our men dying, five and six in a day."

Early on the morning of the 28th of May a faint outline appeared upon the horizon, but because of the haziness of the weather it was thought to be only a cloud, and thus the island was missed on the first attempt. Accordingly the ship was headed eastward for the coast of Chile so that a new and certain point of departure might be secured for a second effort to reach Juan Fernandez. Finally on the 9th of June Anson's goal loomed in plain sight, but it was not until the next day that his debilitated crew were able to get the Centurion into harbor and at anchor. Out of the nearly five hundred men which she carried when she left Patagonia so few were left when Juan Fernandez was reached that it took these two hours to handle the canvas and four hours to haul in the cable so that the anchor, which had been dropped, was just clear of the ground.

Knowing that he no longer had force enough to carry out the ambitious programme originally outlined for him Anson, having been joined by two of his vessels and having captured a small Spanish craft, decided to harass shipping trading up and down the west coast of South America, and accordingly he despatched his other ships to several rendezvous, having in mind ultimately the capture of the richly laden galleon bound from Manila to Acapulco, Mexico.

On the 19th of September, 1741, the Centurion headed away for the mainland of South America, where she was successful in taking a couple of moderately valuable prizes. From one of these Anson learned that there was treasure lodged in the custom house at Payta, near the present northern boundary of Peru, designed to purchase part of the cargo of the Manila ship when that galleon should arrive on the South American coast. Accordingly the British Commodore determined to attack the place by surprise.

Arriving off that port at night Anson sent an armed force ashore in boats, and the moment the three-score sailors were discovered the citizens fled incontinently, the shouts of the seamen sounding like the cries of a whole regiment. The gallant Governor fled without stopping to dress, leaving behind him his young bride of 17 years and but four days a wife. The landing party made but where they would be certain to meet any vessel approaching that harbor. But the squadron had delayed too long in going northward and the galleon got into port earlier than usual. Undaunted, however, Anson determined to lie in wait for the treasure ship outward bound, knowing that she would then have in place of silks and satins and lace and jewelry the gold and silver of Mexico and her southern neighbors, valued roughly at more than a million dollars.

Anson sent one of his boats, an open craft twenty-two feet long, to watch off the port of Acapulco, and ordered the officer in charge to hold his station ten miles seaward for twenty-four days! The Spaniards saw that sentinel; the Manila ship was held in port until the next year; and when Anson picked up his barge some weeks later the men in it were nearly done for. Fancy a small boat of that size doing scout duty to-day in the open sea.

Anson then made up his mind to take the Centurion and his two other ships to the coast of China, and therefore sailed away from America heading southward to pick up the trade wind, but again he was opposed by westerly gales and strong currents so that after weeks of desperate battling craft had been found unfit for further sea service and, after being stripped, were destroyed. In November following the Centurion anchored at Macao, where she spent the winter being refitted and made ready to intercept the treasure galleon upon her approach to the Philippines from Acapulco in the spring of 1743.

The Centurion took her station off the northeastern coast of the Island of Samar, just out of sight of the Spanish watchers at Cape Espiritu Santo, in the established path of the homeward bound Manila galleon.

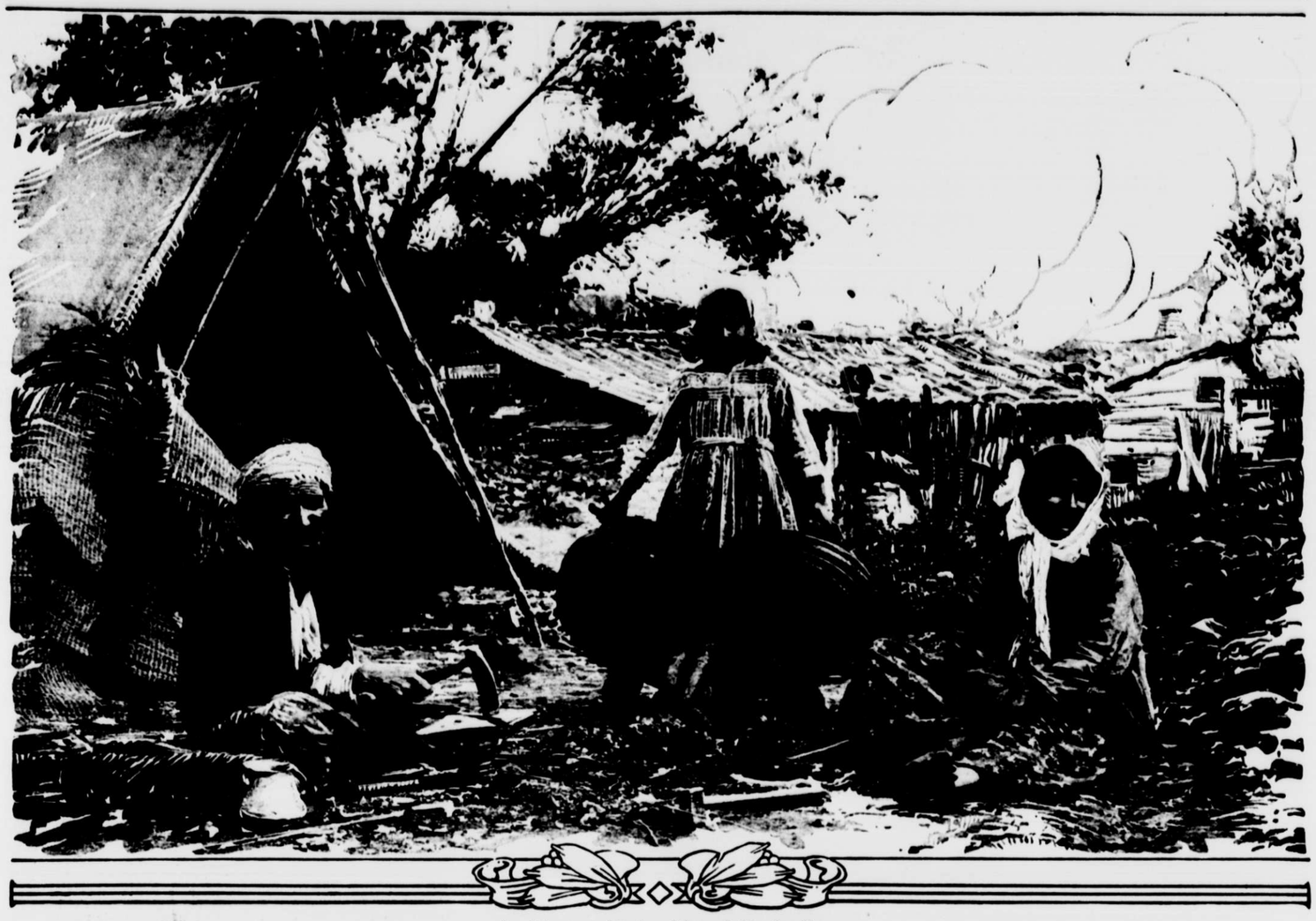
Patience and nearly three years of peril and hardships were at last rewarded, for on the morning of June 20, old style, 1743, at sunrise, a sail was discovered to the southwest, and instantly "a general joy spread through the whole ship, for they had no doubt but that this was one of the galleons." At noon the Centurion was a little more than three miles from the treasure ship, and the enemy showed the standard of Spain aloft. "Toward 1 o'clock the Centurion hoisted her broad pennant and colors, being then within gunshot of the enemy; and the Commodore, perceiving the Spaniards to have neglected clearing their ship till that time, as he saw them throwing overboard cattle and lumber, he gave orders to fire upon them with the chase guns, to disturb them in their work. The galleon returned fire with two of her stern guns, and now the engagement began in earnest, and for the first half hour Mr. Anson overreached the galleon, and lay on her bow; where, by the great wideness of his ports, he could traverse almost all his guns upon the enemy, whilst the galleon could bring only a part of hers to bear."

Although larger than the Centurion and with a crew of 550 men, still the galleon, called the Nostra Signora de Cabadonga, was handicapped by mismanagement, and with the fall of her commander, a Portuguese, the battle was virtually won. Her flag officer bore a military title and was Gen. Don Jeronimo de Mentero. The Manila ship lost sixty-seven killed and eighty-four wounded, while the Centurion had only two killed and sixteen wounded—all but one of whom subsequently recovered.

Commodore Anson put a prize crew aboard the Nostra Signora de Cabadonga and convoyed her back to Macao, where the prize was sold after removing treasure and booty worth a million and a half of dollars.

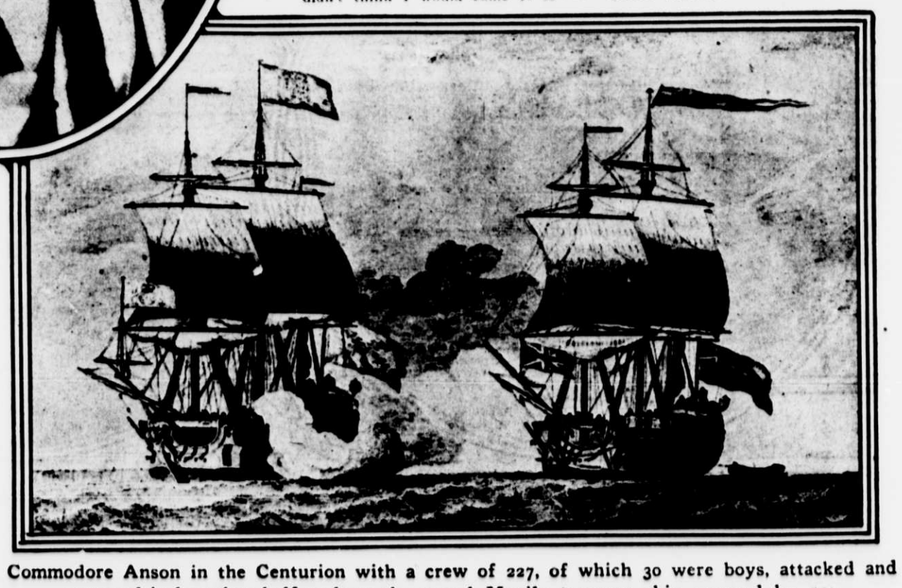
On December 15, 1743, the Centurion set sail for England, and nearly six months later, June 12, the ship sighted the Lizard. Three days later, to the infinite joy of all hands, the Centurion anchored at Spithead and one of the most extraordinary cruises in naval annals came to a close.

LEADING THE SIMPLE LIFE IN WAR-WRACKED TURKEY



An itinerant blacksmith and his family.

Commodore George Anson.



Commodore Anson in the Centurion with a crew of 227, of which 30 were boys, attacked and captured in less than half an hour the armed Manila treasure ship manned by 550.

HIS SECOND SENIOR CLASS DAY

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was a change for the better, but it was a change.

"It is more wonderful not to have met—in thirty years," he answered.

"Oh—Chicago is a long way off."

"It isn't Chicago that is a long way off," he answered quickly; "it's X——," and they both smiled.

"Yes," she admitted, "we are a little of a back number—but since we don't know it——? Nothing has really changed."

"No; not even the old gate—nor the latch it has the same old squeak," he said lightly.

She looked at him astonished.

"How do you know that?"

And he answered with perfectly incredible simplicity and straightforwardness:

"Because I've just been there. You didn't think I would come to X—— and not go there? But there was nobody on the doorstep."

She looked at him with kind eyes.

"It was nice of you to go; no, they are all gone but ourselves." He saw her sadden for a moment, in the touch of memory, then she put it by and smiled at him. "Still we do sit on doorsteps even now—but well chaperoned. We are not quite a country village; we have changed a little after all."

"I don't think you have," he said suddenly.

She laughed outright.

"After thirty years!—and more than thirty pounds!—and six daughters! Did you know I had six daughters?" She spoke seriously, with unmistakable pride.

"Six——" He was looking at her with fascination. Of course she would have had six daughters; it was written. "Are they all here?" he inquired vaguely.

"Dear me, no. Only one—the baby; the others are married."

Of course they would be married, he thought again; if she had had sixteen.

"And the baby?"

"Is over my head—I must introduce you——" she glanced around. "She was here a moment ago—probably they've slipped over to Memorial to dance—well; her father is there, and Memorial is thick with patronesses," she smiled again. "I told you—we chaperon religiously nowadays."

"In our day—it didn't seem to be necessary," he remarked.

"No," she said thoughtfully, "it didn't." He saw her clear and innocent gaze go backward into that past and across his own mind rushed the memory of that long, that exquisite intimacy, in which, in the flush of youth, he had never touched her lips nor so much as held her hand. Then suddenly he remembered other things.

"There were some who would have borne a little chaperoning even then," he said brusquely, but he saw that the words did not reach her. For the first time it occurred to him why the tending of fires had always been entrusted to vestal virgins.

"Tell me something of your life all these years," he said quickly, and she came out of her musing to answer:

"There has not been much to tell; we have lived very quietly—with our children. My husband"— she woke up suddenly—"you remember my husband?" and again, as when she had spoken of her six daughters, an army with banners looked out of her eyes; at least that was the impression they made upon him.

"Very well indeed," he added perfunctorily. "I hope to have the pleasure of renewing our acquaintance." Meanwhile he hardly heard what she went on to say, so busy was he with the inner vision of her life. Six girls—and a college professor's salary—it was easy enough to see the rest; yet she could afford to flaunt banners in her eyes. This woman had then the capacity of living her dreams; she would have kept the dream alive if——

"Then you have lacked nothing?" he said.

"Oh, yes," she answered quickly, with an entire change of manner; "I have no son."

He looked at her silently a moment.

"Thank you," he said.

"I don't need to ask you anything," her voice was quick with feeling. "Howard has told me all; but—you have him!"

"Yes," he assented, "I have him. By the way," he spoke suddenly, turning toward her the face he had half averted, "you spend your summers at Ogunquitt, I believe?"

"Yes; we have a kind of modest bungalow there; we had to go somewhere for the children, and it has been a good place for my husband's work."

Her companion smiled and frowned together into the darkness outside, where the Glee Club was singing. The other occupants of the room had drifted out to the campus or to Memorial, where the dancing was; for the moment they were quite alone, as they looked down upon the scene below. Her hand lay beside him on the window sill; untouchable now as then, to him; he looked at it remembering, and an irrepressible desire came upon him to know if she remembered, too. It forced itself from his lips.

"Do you remember?"

She answered instantly.

"I remember perfectly; we stood in this very window. How it must all come back to you to-night—in your son!"

How it must all come back to him! He longed to know how much she remembered, how much she knew; but the silence of the past was between them. One has but one class day!

Yet he was conscious that he was happier, even as things were, here beside her than he had been since he stood there last. She had done for him again what she had done before—she had renewed his faith of youth; he knew now that some things were possible—even if not to him.

"Well, have you two reminisced up the whole past?" His son's gay, suspiciously gay, voice made them both turn with a start.

"Child, where have you been?" The laughing reproach from his companion fell on the elder man's ear vaguely, as he gazed at the girl beside his son. She was taller than her mother, and far prettier than her mother had ever been, though this he could not know; and she had been to college, which her mother had not; but she had been to college exactly as her mother would have gone, had carried the candid dream in her eyes all through it, and when she smiled now at him she smiled with her mother's very lips.

"This is my baby," said the mother, and as the daughter gave him her hand she looked at him fearlessly. Another keeper of fires!—he saw them veiled in her glance. And he had said to himself that there were not two such pairs of eyes in the world—as there were not two senior class days.

"If you don't mind, Pater," meantime his son was saying with some becoming embarrassment, "I'm going to walk home with them (the professor is waiting downstairs, Mrs. Thacher). Will you wait here or shall I find you at the hotel?"

He saw the remonstrance shape itself upon the mother's lips and checked it with a glance.

"I'll wait here," he replied promptly. "And don't hurry—I like to hear the singing."

As the ladies passed out of the rooms he laid a detaining hand on his son's arm and looked into the young man's conscious eyes.

"While you are about, Howard," he said dryly, "you might as well complete your arrangements for—Ogunquitt."

The glance his son flung back was charming in its triumph.

"Thanks," he said; "it's all arranged."

He wrung his father's hand in a hasty grip and rushed off after his guests. Mr. Devine, turning back to the window, quite ignoring the mountain of cigars, looked down upon the fast thinning campus, where the lanterns tossed fantastically. The Glee Club was in full swing now, and up from below came tenderly, exuberantly, triumphantly, by turns, the shout of the young serenaders:

"Good night!—Good night, beloved!"

Smiling as he listened, he took from his pocket the leather case and dropped a little faded white rose down into the night.